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SUBJECT: MIXED REACTIONS TO OBAMA'S CALL FOR DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM IN
TURKEY

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2009

In Today's Papers

Obama's Messages Meet Mixed Opinions Regarding Democracy, Freedom in
Turkey

Media outlets continue to praise the effects of Obama's visit to
Turkey, but a controversy has erupted over Obama's call to re-open
the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary in Istanbul. In "Thank you,
President Obama," Sahin Alpay of Islamist-oriented Zaman wrote
"Obama is an extraordinary leader" whose visit "was a powerful
expression of support for freedom and pluralist democracy in
Turkey." On the other hand, mainstream Milliyet reports in "The
First 'No' to Obama," that "State Minister for Religious Affairs
Saiz Yazicioglu said "The call from the U.S. President (to open
Halki Seminary) will not change anything," as "Prime Minister
Erdogan also indicated that there are no preparations to reopen
Halki Seminary." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet tells a different
story, namely that "anonymous" AKP officials "said the seminary was
closed down due to tensions in Cyprus, but today there are no
obstacles in the way of the reopening of the seminary." Finally,
liberal Radikal says "AKP officials are looking for a formula to
solve the issue of the seminary."

Opposition Parties React to Obama's Use of the Term 'Minority' When
Referring to Kurds

Mainstream Hurriyet writes President Obama's use of the term
"minority" when referring to Kurds during his Tuesday meeting with
students in Istanbul has drawn reaction from the political parties.
AKP deputy group chief Nihat Ergun said President Obama did not use
the term as a reference to the Minority Law in Turkey. "The bans on
the Kurdish language courses, Kurdish names, and television
broadcasts do not exist today. The problems of the Kurds can be
resolved through the procedures of democracy and rule of law, and
not through minority law," emphasized Ergun. Main opposition CHP
deputy group chief Hakki Suha Okay said, "The U.S. President must
have been briefed wrong. Kurdish people enjoy all the rights that
Turkish people do -- calling the Kurds a minority is a huge
injustice to the Kurdish people." Opposition far right MHP deputy
group chief Oktay Vural said Obama's mention of a "Kurdish minority"

indicates he had a project to "create" a new minority. "This is an initiative to divide the Turkish people. I invite Obama to apologize to the Turkish people and the Kurds," said Oktay. The pro-Kurdish DTP MP Hasip Kaplan said "Turkey's 20 million Kurds do not enjoy even few of the rights exercised by the minorities in the country," and "From the viewpoint of rights, the term 'minority' is correct. Minority, in this sense, is a general term used under the EU framework which comprises the Kurds, Circassians and the Laz," stressed Kaplan.

Editorial Commentary on President Obama's Turkey Visit

Mehmet Barlas wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Before we get riled up over why Obama asked for a settlement to the Cyprus issue and to other issues, we better face with the truth. This country is famous for piling up crises, one after another. The EU reform crisis is 46 years old and the Cyprus problem is 35 years old."

Cuneyt Ulsever wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "Unlike Turkish leaders, President Obama presented himself as a first class politician who has mastered first class public relations skills. Projects for the future and statements expressing real vision came from Obama, not from any Turkish leaders he met."

Fehmi Kuru wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "As proven by the Obama visit, Turkey is an immediate priority for Washington. Given the crisis-mongering administration in Israel, Turkey has become even closer to U.S. foreign policy priorities."

Ismet Berkan wrote in liberal intellectual Radikal: "Relations

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between Turkey and Azerbaijan are very important, but these relations should not be allowed to hold Turkish-Armenian relations hostage. Opening the border might be not easy at this point but Turkey at least should be able to establish diplomatic ties with Armenia before April 24."

Nazli Ilıcak wrote in mainstream Sabah: "President Obama should have used the word 'discrimination' regarding the Kurds instead of 'minority' because Kurds are not a minority even though they suffer from discriminatory attitudes on certain grounds. Obama also mentioned the reopening of Halki Seminary which must remind us of the urgent need for concrete action. The Seminary first opened in 1884 and stayed open until 1971. There is no excuse for not opening it again."

Obama Gives Iraqi Leaders Support for Iraq's Territorial Integrity
Mainstream Sabah reports that, during his surprising visit to Baghdad, President Obama met with Iraqi President Talabani, PM Maliki and KRG President Mesoud Barzani to tell them that "the time has come for Iraq to take responsibility for Iraq." During Obama's meeting with President Talabani, he stressed the importance of the friendship between the US and Iraq. When President Obama met with PM Maliki, he reiterated that all US troops will withdraw from Iraq by 2011. Moreover, Obama assured Maliki that the US had no eyes on Iraqi territory or Iraqi natural resources. In response to Obama's comments, PM Maliki said "Iraq is a more secure, peaceful and stable country now and Iraq is expecting foreign investors." During the meeting with KRG President Mesoud Barzani, President Obama stressed that he is very pleased with the improved relations between the Kurdish Regional Government, the US, Baghdad and Turkey. Barzani responded by saying "It appears the U.S. will withdraw from Iraq soon. The Iraqi constitution guarantees its territorial integrity; based on the constitution, the joint government should continue. It is not acceptable for only one side to have superiority. Some are trying to weaken the Kurds' role in Iraq. Five thousand of our villages have been burned to the ground in the past. Chemical weapons were used against us. We were saved from all that with the help of the US." President Obama responded by saying, "I am aware of this history and I trust Iraq's integrity, along with its constitution. I hope you have the same trust. Our support for Iraq and the Kurdistan region will continue. Moreover, I was pleased to see improved relations between Turkey and the Kurdistan region. I mentioned this in Turkey as well."

Kurdish Conference

Mainstream Sabah reports that the mainly pro-Kurdish political opposition party DTP is focusing on the Kurdish Conference it will be organizing together with KRG President Mesoud Barzani's political party KDP in Arbil in May. Sabah says "The DTP is trying to convince Mesoud Barzani to give a nod to the PKK's participation to the conference; otherwise the DTP will not attend the conference." When Iraqi President Talabani visited Turkey, he invited the DTP administration to Iraq to work on the Kurdish Conference. Regarding the issue, the DTP Batman Lawmaker, Bengi Yildiz, said "the counterpart to the Kurdish question is the PKK," and "the DTP would not attend a conference where the PKK is not represented."

Historic Plunge in Industrial Output: 23.7 Percent (Hurriyet)

Milliyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Vatan, Referans, Radikal: Industrial production has fallen to a record low after a 23.7 percent drop in February. There were sharp declines in production in the automotive sector, the electronic sector and the textile sector. In a related story, liberal Radikal's headline reads "Minister Simsek Is in Wonderland" and reports that despite the 23.7 percent drop in industrial output, State Minister Mehmet Simsek expressed his optimism about the Turkish economy and said "households are fine and there are no problems in the public sector."

YOK to 'Divide' Universities with Over 40,000 Students

Liberal Radikal and leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet report the Higher

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Education Council (YOK) will 'divide' universities in the country with over 40,000 students. YOK chair Professor Yusuf Ziya Ozcan said the "restructuring" aims to ease the management of the universities which have grown too big, with their buildings scattered around cities. YOK is expected to prepare a draft bill to 'divide' Istanbul University, Marmara University, Gazi University, Selcuk University and Uludag University. Five members of the YOK board reportedly raised objections, saying the changes to be imposed were not compatible with "university autonomy" and "democratic culture," say papers.

Uproar in Moldova Attributed to Romania, Twitter

Media outlets use sensational headlines to report the anti-communist demonstrations in Moldova this week were quickly organized through a Twitter campaign. At the same time, the government of Moldova is explicitly accusing its EU-member neighbor, Romania, for inciting the uprising against the pro-Russia government. In "A Twitter Uprising," mainstream Haberturk reports "The social networking website Twitter launched the protests in Moldova in which demonstrators invaded parliament." Islamist-oriented Zaman notes, "Moldova Holds Romania Responsible for the Disaster Caused by the Opposition's Uprising." Liberal Radikal headlines, "A Romanian Experiment with a 'Digital Coup,'" and reports "Supporters of the West in Moldova used Facebook and Twitter to organize and launch a coup." Mainstream Aksam headlines, "The EU-Russia War in Moldova," and report "anti-communist demonstrators filled the streets of Chisinau with Romanian flags in their hands." Leftist Taraf reports "Moldova Accuses Its Neighbor," as State President Voronin warns the protestors "Don't test my patience." Meanwhile, CNN Turk reports "The Romanian Ambassador to Moldova was declared persona-non-grata and given 24 hours to leave the country."

Cuban Leaders Signal Support to Obama

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines "From Castro to the U.S. Delegation: How Can We Assist Obama?" and notes, "The U.S. Congressional Delegation, comprised of three Democrats of the African-American Lobby, visiting Cuba was able to come together with Raul and Fidel Castro," and "Raul and Fidel are ready for meetings with the U.S." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Castro Winks at the U.S."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- Former Housing Minister Koray Aydin stated opposition MHP leader Devlet Bahceli cannot run for a new term in office, and called for extraordinary party convention.

- Following a meeting with PM Erdogan yesterday, Industry Minister Zafer Caglayan, Labor Minister Faruk Celik and chief EU negotiator Egemen Bagis agreed to make arrangements for declaring May 1 as official holiday.
- Turk-Is labor union will ask Istanbul governor for permission to hold May Day celebrations on Taksim Square in the heart of the city.
- The Diyarbakir prosecutor initiated an investigation against AKP MP Ihsan Arslan for spreading PKK propaganda in a speech in the city.
- The pro-Kurdish DTP MP Sebahat Tuncel has filed a motion for changes in the compulsory military service law.

World

- Turkish Cyprus PM Ferdi Sabit Soyer has asked the prosecutor to investigate the alleged links between the 'Ergenekon' network and former president Rauf Denktas and former PM Dervis Eroglu.

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- The Turkish Cypriot-administered area of Cyprus will hold general elections on April 19.
- On April 10, Russian PM Putin will meet with his Iraqi counterpart al-Maliki in Moscow to discuss stronger trade and economic relations.
- Deputy Oil Minister Hossein Noghrehkar Shirazi said Wednesday "Tehran is ready to invite U.S. companies for oil projects in Iran."
- The International Committee of the Red Cross says health workers violated medical ethics when they helped interrogate terrorism suspects who were tortured at secret CIA prisons overseas.

JEFFREY